

CTE Teachers as Content Area

Reading Teachers



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BY PATRICK O'CONNOR

Content area literacy instruction must be viewed as the cornerstone of any comprehensive movement to build the kinds of thriving, intellectually vibrant secondary schools young people deserve and on which the nation's social and economic health will depend (Heller and Greenleaf, 2007). Reading is a critical skill in our current world and will continue to be in the future. Our society, globalization and the high-performance workforce require increased amounts of reading. There is considerable evidence that reading is important. There is also considerable evidence that we, as a society, need to improve our overall reading competence. CTE is emerging as a reading content area similar to other academic areas such as social studies, math and science. The primary reason for this is that

CTE is more integrated with academic subjects. This trend is prompting CTE teachers to become more active in supporting their students' reading through their CTE subject area. The intent of this article is to explain the emerging role of CTE in reading, and to offer direction for CTE teachers to support their students' reading interest and ability.

Content Area Reading

There is considerable evidence that students need to improve their reading ability. A recent report on the subject from the Carnegie Council points out that the pace of literacy improvement has not kept up with the accelerating demand of the global knowledge economy. This tends to put students at risk of dropping out, underperforming or graduating without the skills to be prepared for college, work

or citizenship (Carnegie Council, 2010).

Traditionally, reading has been considered the realm of elementary teachers. For the most part, learning to read is taught only in grades K-3. And, although the foundation established in the early grades can be sound, the ability to read can diminish in later grades, especially in middle school.

Typically, teachers in grades four and beyond teach subject matter. In some respects, if students are unable to read by the third grade, they will have a difficult time catching up. As a result, this has led to more reading preparation for teachers in grades 4-12. Most university teacher education programs today include a course in teaching reading in the content area. However, many reading specialists believe one course is insufficient to prepare content teachers to assist their

students in improving their reading ability. Content area reading is a primary method to strengthen student interest and ability to read. It is often also referred to as reading across the curriculum.

CTE Teachers and Content Area Teaching

CTE teachers are usually prepared in a traditional or nontraditional manner. Some CTE areas such as marketing, business, and family and consumer sciences have traditional teacher education programs. Students completing these programs will take a course in content area reading. Many CTE teachers, however, are licensed via nontraditional routes. These teachers may need more support for teaching in the content area as they typically receive limited instruction in how to teach reading. However, regard-

less of the teacher education approach, there is great potential for teaching reading via CTE subjects.

CTE teachers have an excellent opportunity to motivate their students to read for three reasons:

- Students are more likely to read and comprehend material that interests them. The practical and occupational nature of CTE subjects can foster this interest.
- CTE subjects are contextual in nature. As a result, CTE can help students better understand academic concepts embedded in CTE.
- CTE programs feature classroom, laboratory and youth organization instruction offered in a collaborative effort. Teachers can connect reading and reinforce content from interrelated instructional perspectives.

Teaching Reading via CTE

There are five points all teachers, including CTE educators, need to know about teaching reading.

1. Reading and comprehending are the same thing.
2. Reading and writing support each other.
3. The more difficult the text the more

important instruction using social interaction is.

4. Students learn to read when they practice before, during and after comprehension strategies.
5. The more a student knows about a subject, the easier it will be to read about it.

CTE teachers have additional opportunities to teach reading via their subject matter. The following seven strategies can be used to encourage reading:

1. **Student choice.** It is widely believed that students who have input in selecting their reading material are more likely to read. CTE teachers should provide students with numerous options to select reading material.
2. **Connect reading and writing.** Capitalize on student practical and occupational interests by utilizing career-/work-related reading material, including journals, trade newsletters, professional association Web sites and manuals. Have students write journals about their reading and prepare written assignments and reports. Students can also work in teams to prepare reports as they would in their career areas.
3. **Read aloud.** Though many teachers

may think this an elementary strategy, it is widely known that reading aloud is an effective strategy to teach reading. Also, the teacher should model this behavior by reading aloud too.

4. Recognize alternative literacy approaches. Students are spending more and more time surfing the Internet, texting and blogging. Teachers can incorporate these reading approaches into their classrooms. A basic SCANS competency is for CTE students to be able to locate information through technology.

5. Provide alternative reading materials for students who need remediation. Students rarely start and stay at the same reading pace. Many students may need to “prime the pump” before they can advance to more sophisticated content. This is particularly true as CTE programs become more academic in nature. Teachers may need to provide students reading material that strengthens their ability to read before they engage them in content. Some students may also need information on how to actually use the components of a textbook such as an index or glossary.

6. Literacy-rich classroom environment. Teachers should make reading a priority in their classrooms. This will be evident by the amount and type of reading material available to students. Classrooms should have a library and resource area, including magazines, reference books, newsletters, manuals, career guides, comic books and graphic novels available for students to read.

7. Increase expectations for reading in and out of school. Be certain reading and writing are happening daily in your classroom. Also, encourage students to read away from school and provide incentives for it. Research on reading indicates that 20 percent of students spend no time reading in the typical school week. Also, students

report spending only four minutes daily reading, but they watch as much as 130 minutes of television. Notify parents that you will be emphasizing reading and expecting them to reinforce it.

Moving Forward

There is considerable information available on how to effectively teach reading. Even though CTE teachers may have limited professional preparation in teaching reading, they can still incorporate developing students’ reading skills in their programs. CTE has a great opportunity to prepare students in the most important and marketable skill students can have for the high-performance workforce of today and the future: being a lifelong learner. A bigger commitment to reading is the starting point. **■**

References

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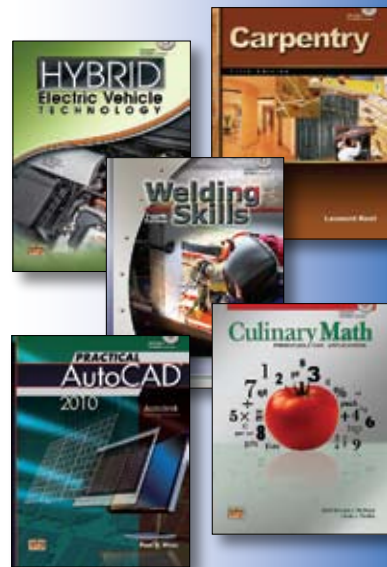
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